

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAM-01 SAJ-01 IO-13 /078 W

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O R 271452Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9749

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USIA WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6491

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, SY, IZ, LE, PLO

SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN "BLACK JUNE" OPERATION AGAINST DAMASCUS

SEMIRAMIS HOTEL

1. SUMMARY: SEMIRAMIS HOTEL OPERATION CONDUCTED BY FOUR PALESTINIANS SEPT 26 LEFT FOUR HOSTAGES DEAD, THIRTY-FOUR WOUNDED AND AROUND FIVE SYRIAN SOLDIERS WOUNDED. LEADER OF GUERRILLA TEAM KILLED DURING FIGHTING AND OTHER THREE INTERROGATED, INTERVIEWED ON TELEVISION, TRIED SEPT 26 AND EXECUTED MORNING SEPT 27. THEY CONFESSED THEY BELONGED TO FATAH AND RECEIVED ORDERS FOR OPERATION WHILE IN BAGHDAD. CALLED THEMSELVES MEMBERS OF "BLACK JUNE" ORGANIZATION AND CLAIMED

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THEY SEEKING RELEASE OF PRISONERS ACCUSED OF PLACING NUMEROUS

BOMBS THROUGHOUT SYRIA. SYRIAN FORCES PRAISED BY HOSTAGES FOR TRYING TO SVE THEIR LIVES. PRES ASAD TOLD GROUP OF MILITARY OFFICERS FATAH MUST CLEANSE ITS RANKS OF "DEVIATIONISTS." WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE SARG WILL EXPLOIT THIS OPERATION AS REASON BOYCOTT ARAB SUMMIT ALTHOUGH MORNING PRESS TOOK SWIPE AT EGYPT AND IRAQ (AS WELL AS WASHINGTON) FOR CONSPIRING AGAINST SYRO-PALESTINIAN ALLIANCE. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER INCIDENT WILL SOW MORE DISCORD BETWEEN SYRIA AND PALESTINIANS OR, BY ITS SHOCK, REVERSE STEADY TREND TOWARD GREATER DETERIORATION. SWIFTNESS OF TRIAL/ EXECUTION DESIGNED TO DETER PLANNERS OF ANY FUTURE SUCH OPERATIONS IN SYRIA AND A MEASURE BOTH OF HOW SURPRISED AND SHAKEN SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WAS BY SEMIRAMIS ATTACK. SEMIRAMIS OPERATION PORTENDS NEW PHASE OF VIOLENCE DIRECTED AGAINST SARG DISTURBED THAT ITS PRO-PALESTINIAN CREDENTIALS HAVE BEEN QUESTIONED SO OPENLY. END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF SEPT 26 "BLACK JUNE" PALESTINIAN OPERATION IN HEART OF DAMASCUS PIECED TOGETHER FROM EYE-WITNESS AND MEDIA ACCOUNTS: FOUR-MAN TEAM ENTERED SEMIRAMIS HOTEL APPROXIMATELY 0800L, GATHERED HOSTAGES FROM FIRST FLOOR LOBBY AND SECOND FLOOR RESTAURANT/MEZZANINE AND PROCEEDED TO FOURTH FLOOR. SYRIAN MILITARY/POLICE UNITS ARRIVED AND PALESTINIANS BEGAN SHOOTING. SYRIANS USED AT LEAST THREE APC'S TO SPRAY BUILDING AND DRAW FIRE, BRINGING GROUP TO EXHAUST ITS AMMO SUPPLY. SYRIAN FORCES THEN STORMED HOTEL, CAPTURED PALESTINIANS AND RELEASED HOSTAGES. MEDIA CLAIMS SYRIANS KILLED LEADER OF ATTACKERS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO HOSTAGE, LEADER OF ATTACK -- WITH CODENAME ABU HASHISH -- AND THREE FEMALE HOSTAGES WERE KILLED AND MANY HOSTAGES WOUNDED WHEN GRENADE WHICH ABU HASHISH TRIED TO THROW FROM WINDOW MISSED AND BOUNCED BACK INTO ROOM. DANISH HOSTAGE KILLED BY PALESTINIAN ATTACKERS WHEN HE REACHED INTO POCKET, LEADING THEM TO BELIEVE HE CARRYING PISTOL. OTHER HOSTAGES KILLED BY GUERRILLAS WHO THREW SECOND GRENADE INTO GROUP HUDDLED ON FOURTH FLOOR. NONE OF THE HOSTAGES WE HAVE TALKED WITH REPORTED ANY INJURIES RESULTING FROM SYRIAN FIRE WHEN THEY STORMED HOTEL -- ONE HOSTAGE PRAISED SYRIAN FORCES FOR SHOOTING OVER HEADS OF GUERRILLAS WHEN LATTER TOOK COVER AMONG HOSTAGES

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(THIS REPORT, INCIDENTALLY, SUGGESTS THAT SYRIANS MAY HAVE TAKEN SOME CASUALTIES DURING THEIR COUNTER-ATTACK; RETIRED SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICER CLAIMED FIVE SYRIANS WOUNDED).

3. THREE GUERRILLAS CAPTURED WERE INTERROGATED AND THEN INTERVIEWED ON SYRIAN TELEVISION SUNDAY MEVENING. JABBAR MAYI DARWISH AND MUTASIM MUHAMMAD JAYYUSI WERE IDENTIFIED AS PALESTINIANS RESIDENT IN IRAQ; MUHAMMAD ALI HILMI

BARQAWI AS PALESTINIAN RESIDENT IN ZARQA, JORDAN. ALL CLAIMED MEMBERSHIP IN FATAH. (COMMENT: FATAH PUBLICLY DENIED ITS INVOLVEMENT IN INCIDENT SEPT 26.) THEY WERE ALLEGEDLY IN BAGHDAD WHEN THEY RECEIVED ORDERS TO PROCEED, BY SEPARATE ROUTES, INTO SYRIA TO CONDUCT OPERATION. BARQAWI CALLED GROUP "BLACK JUNE" IMPLYING ITS SPAWNED BY FATAH AND SAID THEIR INTENTION WAS TO DETAIN HOSTAGES TO USE IN BARGAINING FOR RELEASE OF PRISONERS CHARGED BY SARG SECURITY WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS SUMMER'S BOMB EXPLOSIONS IN SYRIA.

4. PALESTINIAN GUERRILLAS WERE TRIED BY SUPREME STATE SECURITY COURT SEPT 26 AND SENTENCED DURING COURSE OF DAY TO DEATH BY HANGING. PRES ASAD APPROVED SENTENCE IN DECREE ISSUED SHORTLY AFTER TRIAL. IN PROCEDURE UNUSUAL IN RECENT YEARS HERE, THE THREE WERE PUBLICLY HUNG SHORTLY AFTER SUNRISE NEAR SEMIRAMIS HOTEL, AND THEIR BODIES LEFT ON SCAFFOLDS FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

5. PRES ASAD, CONTINUING HIS TOUR OF SYRIAN MILITARY INSTALLATIONS DURING RAMADAN FEAST DAYS, MET WITH SOME SYRIAN AIR FORCE OFFICERS AFTER HOTEL INCIDENT. HE REMINDED AUDIENCE OF SYRIA'S SACRIFICES FOR PALESTINIAN CAUSE. NOTED THAT SYRIA HAS "REJECTED ALL UNILATERAL AGREEMENTS AND SOLUTIONS AND STEP-BY-STEP POLICY FOR SAKE OF PALESTINE CAUSE AND IN ORDER NOT TO ISOLATE PLO. WE HAVE TENACIOUSLY SUPPORTED RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. HE CHARGED "SOME PLO LEADERS" WITH DEVIATING FROM PALESTINIAN CAUSE, AND CITED SEMIRAMIS OPERATION AS LATEST EVIDENCE OF THEIR DEVIATION. HE PLEDGED SYRIA WOULD NOT BARGAIN IN SUCH MATTERS AND WOULD STRIKE BACK VIOLENTLY.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6491

6. AL-BAATH EDITORIAL DIFFERENTIATED BETWEEN SAVOY HOTEL OPERATION IN TEL AVIV ALONG WITH "OTHER HONORABLE, HERIOC ACTS" AND SEMIRAMIS HOTEL OPERATION, WHICH IMPLEMENTED BY "DEVIATIONISTS WHO HAVE INFILTRATED FATAH MOVEMENT". EDITORIAL CALLED FOR REVIVAL OF SYRO-PALESTINIAN ALLIANCE AND CONCLUDED WITH WARNING TO "EGYPTIAN AND IRAQI REGIMES, TO WASHINGTON, AND TO ALL THOSE CAPITALS CONSPIRING AGAINST OUR PEOPLE THAT SYRO-PALESTINIAN ALLIANCE STRONGER THAN PLOTTERS."

7. COMMENT: IT IS NOT YET CLEAR HOW WEMIRAMIS OPERATION WILL AFFECT SYRO-PALESTINIAN - LEBANESE MEETINGS UNDER ARAB LEAGUE AUSPICES. REGIME'S READINESS TO PUBLICIZE FATAH MEMBERSHIP OF GUERRILLAS INDICATES THAT IT MAY FUEL FURTHER CONFIDENTIAL

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DISCORD AND SUSPICION BETWEEN DAMASCUS AND PALESTINAIN LEADERSHIP. ON OTHER HAND, SHOCK OF INCIDENT MAY COMPEL SOME SERIOUS RE-THINKING OF POLICIES IMPLEMENTED BY BOTH SIDES REGARDING LEBANON WHICH HAVE PERMITTED SYRO-PALESTINIAN RELATIONSHIP TO DETERIORATE SO SHARPLY. AL-BAATH EDITORIAL URGING FATAH TO PUT ITS OWN HOUSE IN ORDER, MAY HAVE TACITLY TAKEN FATAH DENIAL OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR OPERATION INTO ACCOUNT. THERE NO EVIDENCE AS YET THAT SARG WILL USE INCIDENT AS EXCUSE TO BOYCOTT ARAB SUMMIT CONFERENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA.

8. SWIFTNESS AND SEVERITY OF SYRIAN JUSTICE, DESIGNED TO DETER ANY SIMILAR PLAN FOR FUTURE ACTION, ALSO REVEAL HOW ACUTELY EMBARRASSING INCIDENT WAS TO DAMASCUS REGIME STILL UNACCUSTOMED -- IN SPITE OF INTER-ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS CREATED BY ITS INTERVENTION IN LEBANON -- TO HAVING AUTHENTICITY OF ITS LEFTIST AND

PRO-PALESTINIAN CREDENTIALS QUESTIONED. CLAIM THAT
PLANNING FOR OPERATION DONE IN BAGHDAD MAY PARTIALLY
RELIEVE LOCAL EMBARRASSMENT. BUT WE SUSPECT THAT REGIME
WAS, AS ONE LOCAL PALESTINIAN COMMENTED TO US,
SHAKEN THAT SYRIA HAS BECOME TARGET FOR OPERATIONS
FROM WHICH IT PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED ITSELF IMMUNE. IN
CONTRAST TO SPATE OF PREVIOUS BOMBINGS WHICH SEEMED GENERALLY
TIMED TO CAUSE MINIMAL LOSS IN HUMAN LIFE, LATEST
INCIDENT MAY PRESAGE NEW PHASE OF ANTI-SARG
VIOLENCE. UPCOMING ARAB GAMES TO BE STAGED IN THIS CAPITAL
NEXT MONTH WILL OFFER PLENTIFUL OPPORTUNITIES
FOR SIMILAR INCIDENTS.

9. DEMONSTRATION BY GROUP OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
MORNING SEPT 27 IN DAMASCUS WHO MARCHED BY EMBASSY
SHOUTING ASAD'S PRAISES MAY BE ONLY FIRST STAGE OF
REGIME'S ACTIVITY TO COUNTER EFFECTS OF INCIDENT.
ASAD'S COMMENTS ABOUT PEACE PROCESS, IN ADDITION
TO PORTRAYING SYRIA'S PAST ACTIONS IN MOST FAVORABLE LIGHT,
MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN INTENDED AS REMINDER TO ARAFAT THAT
SYRIA STILL HAS DIPLOMATIC OPTION TO PROCEED IN MANNER THAT WILL
BE LESS SOLICITOUS OF PALESTINIAN INTERESTS IN COURSE OF
ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE SETTLEMENT EFFORTS.
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